

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 279

To reform and enhance the pay and benefits of Federal wildland firefighters,
and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 28, 2025

Mr. BENNET introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred
to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

A BILL

To reform and enhance the pay and benefits of Federal
wildland firefighters, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; DEFINITIONS; TABLE OF CON-**
4 **TENTS.**

5 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
6 “Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classification and Pay
7 Parity Act” or “Tim’s Act”.

8 (b) DEFINITIONS.—In this Act:

9 (1) DIRECTOR.—The term “Director” means
10 the Director of the Office of Personnel Management.

1 (2) FEDERAL WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER.—The
 2 term “Federal wildland firefighter” means any tem-
 3 porary, seasonal, or permanent position at the De-
 4 partment of Agriculture or the Department of the
 5 Interior, or any Tribal Firefighter, that maintains
 6 group, emergency incident management, or fire
 7 qualifications, as established annually by the Stand-
 8 ards for Wildland Fire Position Qualifications pub-
 9 lished by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group,
 10 and primarily engages in or supports wildland fire
 11 management activities, including forestry and range-
 12 land technicians and positions concerning aviation,
 13 engineering heavy equipment operations, dispatch, or
 14 fire and fuels management.

15 (3) SECRETARIES.—The term “Secretaries”
 16 means the Secretary of Agriculture and the Sec-
 17 retary of the Interior.

18 (c) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for
 19 this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title; definitions; table of contents.
- Sec. 2. Special base rates of pay for wildland firefighters.
- Sec. 3. Wildland fire incident response premium pay.
- Sec. 4. Special limitations on pay for wildland firefighters.
- Sec. 5. Rest and recuperation leave for employees engaged in wildland fire-
fighting.
- Sec. 6. Health provisions.
- Sec. 7. Retirement for firefighters.
- Sec. 8. Pay parity for Federal structural firefighters.
- Sec. 9. Pay adjustments and other matters.
- Sec. 10. Wildland Fire Management Casualty Assistance Program.
- Sec. 11. Continuing accrual of service for firefighters.

1 **SEC. 2. SPECIAL BASE RATES OF PAY FOR WILDLAND FIRE-**
 2 **FIGHTERS.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter III of chapter 53 of
 4 title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting after
 5 section 5332 the following:

6 **“§ 5332a. Special base rates of pay for wildland fire-**
 7 **fighters**

8 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

9 “(1) the term ‘firefighter’ means an employee
 10 who—

11 “(A) is a firefighter within the meaning of
 12 section 8331(21) or section 8401(14);

13 “(B) in the case of an employee who holds
 14 a supervisory or administrative position and is
 15 subject to subchapter III of chapter 83, but
 16 who does not qualify to be considered a fire-
 17 fighter within the meaning of section 8331(21),
 18 would otherwise qualify if the employee had
 19 transferred directly to that position after serv-
 20 ing as a firefighter within the meaning of that
 21 section;

22 “(C) in the case of an employee who holds
 23 a supervisory or administrative position and is
 24 subject to chapter 84, but who does not qualify
 25 to be considered a firefighter within the mean-
 26 ing of section 8401(14), would otherwise qualify

1 if the employee had transferred directly to that
2 position after performing duties described in
3 section 8401(14)(A) for at least 3 years; or

4 “(D) in the case of an employee who is not
5 subject to subchapter III of chapter 83 or chap-
6 ter 84, holds a position that the Office of Per-
7 sonnel Management determines would satisfy
8 subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) if the employee
9 were subject to subchapter III of chapter 83 or
10 chapter 84;

11 “(2) the term ‘General Schedule base rate’
12 means an annual rate of basic pay established under
13 section 5332 before any additions, such as a locality-
14 based comparability payment under section 5304 or
15 5304a or a special rate supplement under section
16 5305;

17 “(3) the term ‘special base rate’ means an an-
18 nual rate of basic pay payable to a wildland fire-
19 fighter, before any additions or reductions, that re-
20 places the General Schedule base rate otherwise ap-
21 plicable to the wildland firefighter and that is ad-
22 ministered in the same manner as a General Sched-
23 ule base rate; and

24 “(4) the term ‘wildland firefighter’ has the
25 meaning given the term ‘Federal wildland fire-

fighter’ in section 1(b) of the Tim Hart Wildland
Firefighter Classification and Pay Parity Act.

“(b) SPECIAL BASE RATES OF PAY.—

“(1) ENTITLEMENT TO SPECIAL RATE.—Notwithstanding section 5332, a wildland firefighter is entitled to a special base rate at grades 1 through 15, which shall—

“(A) replace the otherwise applicable General Schedule base rate for the wildland firefighter;

“(B) be basic pay for all purposes, including the purpose of computing a locality-based comparability payment under section 5304 or 5304a; and

“(C) be computed as described in paragraph (2) and adjusted at the time of adjustments in the General Schedule.

“(2) COMPUTATION.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—The special base rate for a wildland firefighter shall be derived by increasing the otherwise applicable General Schedule base rate for the wildland firefighter by the following applicable percentage for the grade of the wildland firefighter and rounding the result to the nearest whole dollar:

- 1 “(i) For GS–1, 42 percent.
- 2 “(ii) For GS–2, 39 percent.
- 3 “(iii) For GS–3, 36 percent.
- 4 “(iv) For GS–4, 33 percent.
- 5 “(v) For GS–5, 30 percent.
- 6 “(vi) For GS–6, 27 percent.
- 7 “(vii) For GS–7, 24 percent.
- 8 “(viii) For GS–8, 21 percent.
- 9 “(ix) For GS–9, 18 percent.
- 10 “(x) For GS–10, 15 percent.
- 11 “(xi) For GS–11, 12 percent.
- 12 “(xii) For GS–12, 9 percent.
- 13 “(xiii) For GS–13, 6 percent.
- 14 “(xiv) For GS–14, 3 percent.
- 15 “(xv) For GS–15, 1.5 percent.

16 “(B) HOURLY, DAILY, WEEKLY, OR BI-
 17 WEEKLY RATES.—When the special base rate
 18 with respect to a wildland firefighter is ex-
 19 pressed as an hourly, daily, weekly, or biweekly
 20 rate, the special base rate shall be computed
 21 from the appropriate annual rate of basic pay
 22 derived under subparagraph (A) in accordance
 23 with the rules under section 5504(b).”.

24 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 25 for subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5, United States

1 Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to
 2 section 5332 the following:

“5332a. Special base rates of pay for wildland firefighters.”.

3 (c) PREVAILING RATE EMPLOYEES.—Section 5343
 4 of title 5, United States Code, is amended by adding at
 5 the end the following:

6 “(g)(1) For a prevailing rate employee described in
 7 section 5342(a)(2)(A) who is a wildland firefighter, as de-
 8 fined in section 5332a(a), the Secretary of Agriculture or
 9 the Secretary of the Interior (as applicable) shall increase
 10 the wage rates of that employee by an amount (determined
 11 at the sole and exclusive discretion of the applicable Sec-
 12 retary after consultation with the other Secretary) that is
 13 generally consistent with the percentage increases given
 14 to wildland firefighters in the General Schedule under sec-
 15 tion 5332a.

16 “(2) An increased wage rate under paragraph (1)
 17 shall be basic pay for the same purposes as the wage rate
 18 otherwise established under this section.

19 “(3) An increase under this subsection may not cause
 20 the wage rate of an employee to increase to a rate that
 21 would produce an annualized rate in excess of the annual
 22 rate for level IV of the Executive Schedule.”.

23 (d) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by
 24 this section shall take effect on the first day of the first
 25 applicable pay period beginning after the last day of the

1 last pay period for which Federal wildland firefighter tem-
 2 porary salary increases were in effect, as originally author-
 3 ized under section 40803(d)(4)(B) of the Infrastructure
 4 Investment and Jobs Act (16 U.S.C. 6592(d)(4)(B)) and
 5 as extended under the Consolidated Appropriations Act,
 6 2024 (Public Law 118–42; 138 Stat. 25), the Continuing
 7 Appropriations Act, 2025 (division A of Public Law 118–
 8 83; 138 Stat. 1524), and the Further Continuing Appro-
 9 priations Act, 2025 (division A of Public Law 118–158).

10 **SEC. 3. WILDLAND FIRE INCIDENT RESPONSE PREMIUM**
 11 **PAY.**

12 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter V of chapter 55 of
 13 title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting after
 14 section 5545b the following:

15 **“§ 5545c. Incident response premium pay for employ-**
 16 **ees engaged in wildland firefighting**

17 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

18 “(1) the term ‘appropriate committees of Con-
 19 gress’ means—

20 “(A) the Committee on Homeland Security
 21 and Governmental Affairs of the Senate;

22 “(B) the Committee on Energy and Nat-
 23 ural Resources of the Senate;

24 “(C) the Committee on Agriculture, Nutri-
 25 tion, and Forestry of the Senate;

1 “(D) the Committee on Appropriations of
2 the Senate;

3 “(E) the Committee on Oversight and Ac-
4 countability of the House of Representatives;

5 “(F) the Committee on Agriculture of the
6 House of Representatives;

7 “(G) the Committee on Natural Resources
8 of the House of Representatives; and

9 “(H) the Committee on Appropriations of
10 the House of Representatives;

11 “(2) the term ‘covered employee’ means an em-
12 ployee of the Forest Service or the Department of
13 the Interior who is—

14 “(A) a wildland firefighter, as defined in
15 section 5332a(a); or

16 “(B) certified by the applicable agency to
17 perform wildland fire incident-related duties
18 during the period that employee is deployed to
19 respond to a qualifying incident;

20 “(3) the term ‘incident response premium pay’
21 means pay to which a covered employee is entitled
22 under subsection (c);

23 “(4) the term ‘prescribed fire incident’ means a
24 wildland fire originating from a planned ignition in

1 accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regula-
2 tions to meet specific objectives;

3 “(5) the term ‘qualifying incident’—

4 “(A) means—

5 “(i) a wildfire incident, a prescribed
6 fire incident, or a severity incident; or

7 “(ii) an incident that the Secretary of
8 Agriculture or the Secretary of the Interior
9 determines is similar in nature to an inci-
10 dent described in clause (i); and

11 “(B) does not include an initial response
12 (including an initial attack fire) in which a
13 wildfire is contained within 36 hours; and

14 “(6) the term ‘severity incident’ means an inci-
15 dent in which a covered employee is pre-positioned
16 in an area in which conditions indicate there is a
17 high risk of wildfires.

18 “(b) ELIGIBILITY.—A covered employee is eligible for
19 incident response premium pay under this section if—

20 “(1) the covered employee is deployed to re-
21 spond to a qualifying incident; and

22 “(2) the deployment described in paragraph (1)
23 is—

24 “(A) outside of the official duty station of
25 the covered employee; or

1 “(B) within the official duty station of the
 2 covered employee and the covered employee is
 3 assigned to an incident-adjacent fire camp or
 4 other designated field location.

5 “(c) ENTITLEMENT TO INCIDENT RESPONSE PRE-
 6 MIUM PAY.—

7 “(1) IN GENERAL.—A covered employee who
 8 satisfies the conditions under subsection (b) is enti-
 9 tled to premium pay for the period in which the cov-
 10 ered employee is deployed to respond to the applica-
 11 ble qualifying incident.

12 “(2) COMPUTATION.—

13 “(A) FORMULA.—Subject to subpara-
 14 graphs (B) and (C), premium pay under para-
 15 graph (1) shall be paid to a covered employee
 16 at a daily rate of 450 percent of the hourly rate
 17 of basic pay of the covered employee for each
 18 day that the covered employee satisfies the re-
 19 quirements under subsection (b), rounded to
 20 the nearest whole cent.

21 “(B) LIMITATION.—Premium pay under
 22 this subsection—

23 “(i) with respect to a covered em-
 24 ployee for whom the annual rate of basic
 25 pay is greater than that for step 10 of GS—

1 10, shall be paid at the daily rate estab-
2 lished under subparagraph (A) for the ap-
3 plicable rate for step 10 of GS–10 (where
4 the applicable rate is the rate in effect in
5 the same locality that is the basis for a lo-
6 cality-based comparability payment payable
7 to the covered employee under section
8 5304); and

9 “(ii) may not be paid to a covered em-
10 ployee in a total amount that exceeds
11 \$9,000 in any calendar year.

12 “(C) ADJUSTMENTS.—

13 “(i) ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary of
14 Agriculture and the Secretary of the Inte-
15 rior shall assess the difference between the
16 average total amount of compensation that
17 was paid to covered employees, by grade,
18 in fiscal years 2023 and 2024.

19 “(ii) REPORT.—Not later than 180
20 days after the date that is 1 year after the
21 effective date of this section, the Secretary
22 of Agriculture and the Secretary of the In-
23 terior shall jointly publish a report on the
24 results of the assessment conducted under
25 clause (i).

1 “(iii) ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS.—

2 After publishing the report required under
3 clause (ii), the Secretary of Agriculture
4 and the Secretary of the Interior, in con-
5 sultation with the Director of the Office of
6 Personnel Management, may, in the sole
7 and exclusive discretion of the Secretaries
8 acting jointly, administratively adjust the
9 amount of premium pay paid under this
10 subsection (or take other administrative
11 action) to ensure that the average annual
12 amount of total compensation paid to cov-
13 ered employees, by grade, is more con-
14 sistent with such amount that was paid to
15 those employees in fiscal year 2023.

16 “(iv) CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICA-
17 TION.—Not later than 3 days after an ad-
18 justment made, or other administrative ac-
19 tion taken, under clause (iii) becomes final,
20 the Secretary of Agriculture and the Sec-
21 retary of the Interior shall jointly submit
22 to the appropriate committees of Congress
23 a notification regarding that adjustment or
24 other administrative action, as applicable.

1 “(d) TREATMENT OF INCIDENT RESPONSE PREMIUM
 2 PAY.—Incident response premium pay under this sec-
 3 tion—

4 “(1) is not considered part of the basic pay of
 5 a covered employee for any purpose;

6 “(2) may not be considered in determining the
 7 lump-sum payment of a covered employee for accu-
 8 mulated and accrued annual leave under section
 9 5551 or section 5552;

10 “(3) may not be used in determining pay under
 11 section 8114;

12 “(4) may not be considered in determining pay
 13 for hours of paid leave or other paid time off during
 14 which the premium pay is not payable; and

15 “(5) shall be disregarded in determining the
 16 minimum wage and overtime pay to which a covered
 17 employee is entitled under the Fair Labor Standards
 18 Act of 1938 (29 U.S.C. 201 et seq.).”.

19 (b) ADDITIONAL PREMIUM PAY AMENDMENTS.—
 20 Subchapter V of chapter 55 of title 5, United States Code,
 21 is amended—

22 (1) in section 5544—

23 (A) by amending the section heading to
 24 read as follows: “**WAGE-BOARD OVERTIME,**

1 **SUNDAY RATES, AND OTHER PREMIUM**
 2 **PAY**”; and

3 (B) by adding at the end the following:

4 “(d) A prevailing rate employee described in section
 5 5342(a)(2)(A) shall receive incident response premium
 6 pay under the same terms and conditions that apply to
 7 a covered employee under section 5545c if that em-
 8 ployee—

9 “(1) is employed by the Forest Service or the
 10 Department of the Interior; and

11 “(2)(A) is a wildland firefighter, as defined in
 12 section 5332a(a); or

13 “(B) is certified by the applicable agency to
 14 perform wildland fire incident-related duties during
 15 the period the employee is deployed to respond to a
 16 qualifying incident (as defined in section
 17 5545c(a)).”; and

18 (2) in section 5547(a), in the matter preceding
 19 paragraph (1), by inserting “5545c,” after
 20 “5545a,”.

21 (c) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The table of sections
 22 for subchapter V of chapter 55 of title 5, United States
 23 Code, is amended—

24 (1) by amending the item relating to section
 25 5544 to read as follows:

“5544. Wage-board overtime, Sunday rates, and other premium pay.”;

1 and

2 (2) by inserting after the item relating to sec-
 3 tion 5545b the following:

“5545c. Incident response premium pay for employees engaged in wildland fire-
 fighting.”.

4 (d) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendments made by
 5 this section shall take effect on the first day of the first
 6 applicable pay period beginning after the last day of the
 7 last pay period for which Federal wildland firefighter tem-
 8 porary salary increases were in effect, as originally author-
 9 ized under section 40803(d)(4)(B) of the Infrastructure
 10 Investment and Jobs Act (16 U.S.C. 6592(d)(4)(B)) and
 11 as extended under the Consolidated Appropriations Act,
 12 2024 (Public Law 118–42; 138 Stat. 25), the Continuing
 13 Appropriations Act, 2025 (division A of Public Law 118–
 14 83; 138 Stat. 1524), and the Further Continuing Appro-
 15 priations Act, 2025 (division A of Public Law 118–158).

16 **SEC. 4. SPECIAL LIMITATIONS ON PAY FOR WILDLAND**
 17 **FIREFIGHTERS.**

18 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—Subchapter V of chapter 55 of
 19 title 5, United States Code, is amended—

20 (1) by inserting after section 5547 the fol-
 21 lowing:

22 **“§ 5547a. Special limitations on premium pay for em-**
 23 **ployees engaged in wildland firefighting**

24 **“(a) DEFINITIONS.**—In this section—

1 “(1) the term ‘covered employee’ means an em-
2 ployee of the Forest Service or the Department of
3 the Interior who—

4 “(A) qualifies as a wildland firefighter
5 based on the definitions of ‘firefighter’ and
6 ‘wildland firefighter’ in section 5332a(a); or

7 “(B) is certified by the applicable agency
8 to perform wildland fire incident related duties
9 during the period the employee is assigned to a
10 qualifying incident;

11 “(2) the term ‘covered services’ means services
12 performed by an employee that are determined by
13 the Secretary of the Interior or the Secretary of Ag-
14 riculture, as applicable, to primarily involve emer-
15 gency wildfire suppression activities, including any
16 period of duty when the employee is sleeping or rest-
17 ing during an extended period of deployment to en-
18 gage in those activities;

19 “(3) the term ‘emergency wildland fire suppres-
20 sion activities’—

21 “(A) means initial-response and extended-
22 response activities that directly relate to sup-
23 pression of a wildfire;

1 “(B) includes activities associated with a
 2 severity incident, as defined in section
 3 5545c(a); and

4 “(C) does not include activities associated
 5 with a prescribed fire incident, as defined in
 6 section 5545c(a); and

7 “(4) the term ‘premium pay’ means the pre-
 8 mium pay paid under the provisions of law cited in
 9 section 5547(a), except as otherwise provided in sub-
 10 section (h).

11 “(b) RELATIONSHIP TO LIMITATION ON PREMIUM
 12 PAY.—Any premium pay earned by a covered employee
 13 for covered services shall be disregarded in calculating the
 14 aggregate of the basic pay and premium pay of that cov-
 15 ered employee for purposes of applying a limitation under
 16 section 5547.

17 “(c) RELATIONSHIP TO LIMITATION ON CERTAIN
 18 PAYMENTS.—Any premium pay of a covered employee
 19 that is disregarded under subsection (b) shall be dis-
 20 regarded in calculating the aggregate pay of that covered
 21 employee for purposes of applying the limitation under
 22 section 5307.

23 “(d) LIMITATION.—

24 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Pay that is disregarded
 25 under subsection (b) may not be paid to the extent

1 that the pay would cause the aggregate of the basic
2 pay, premium pay, and hazard pay under section
3 5545(d) payable in the applicable calendar year to
4 the applicable covered employee to exceed the rate of
5 basic pay payable for a position at level II of the Ex-
6 ecutive Schedule under section 5313, as in effect at
7 the end of that calendar year.

8 “(2) BIWEEKLY LIMITATION.—Any premium
9 pay that is subject to a biweekly limitation under
10 section 5547(c) shall be paid first before other pre-
11 mium pay in applying the limitation under para-
12 graph (1).

13 “(e) WAIVER.—

14 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Application of the limit in
15 subsection (d) or subsection (h) to a covered em-
16 ployee may be waived at the sole and exclusive dis-
17 cretion of the Secretary of the Interior or the Sec-
18 retary of Agriculture, as applicable.

19 “(2) PRESCRIPTION OF CRITERIA.—Before au-
20 thorizing a waiver under paragraph (1) for a covered
21 employee, the Secretary of the Interior or the Sec-
22 retary of Agriculture, as applicable, after consulting
23 with the other Secretary, shall prescribe criteria that
24 will be applied in making a determination to grant
25 a waiver.

1 “(f) LUMP-SUM PAYMENTS.—Any additional pay re-
 2 sulting from application of this section may not be used
 3 in computing a lump-sum payment for accumulated and
 4 accrued annual leave under section 5551 or 5552.

5 “(g) MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS.—The Secretary of
 6 the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture shall main-
 7 tain records that document uses of the authority provided
 8 by this section.

9 “(h) CERTAIN RATE EMPLOYEES.—

10 “(1) IN GENERAL.—For a prevailing rate em-
 11 ployee described in section 5342(a)(2)(A) who is a
 12 covered employee, premium pay may not be paid to
 13 the extent the premium pay would cause the aggre-
 14 gate of the basic pay and premium pay of the em-
 15 ployee in the applicable calendar year to exceed the
 16 rate of basic pay payable for a position at level II
 17 of the Executive Schedule under section 5313, as in
 18 effect at the end of that calendar year.

19 “(2) DEFINITIONS.—For the purposes of this
 20 subsection—

21 “(A) the term ‘basic pay’ means wages, en-
 22 vironmental differential pay, and night shift dif-
 23 ferential pay; and

1 “(B) the term ‘premium pay’ means over-
 2 time pay, Sunday premium pay, and holiday
 3 premium pay.”; and

4 (2) in section 5541(2)(xi), by inserting “,
 5 5547a(h),” after “section 5544”.

6 (b) CALENDAR YEAR 2025.—For the purpose of ap-
 7 plying section 5547 of title 5, United States Code, and
 8 section 1701 of division B of the Extending Government
 9 Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act (5
 10 U.S.C. 5547 note) in calendar year 2025, incident standby
 11 premium pay shall be included in premium pay that is sub-
 12 ject to the limits established in those sections.

13 (c) EFFECTIVE DATES.—

14 (1) AMENDMENTS.—The amendments made by
 15 subsection (a) shall take effect on the first day of
 16 the first pay period that has a payment date in Jan-
 17 uary 2026.

18 (2) CALENDAR YEAR 2025 APPLICATION.—Sub-
 19 section (b) shall take effect on the first day of the
 20 first applicable pay period beginning on or after Oc-
 21 tober 1, 2025.

22 (d) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 23 for subchapter V of chapter 55 of title 5, United States
 24 Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to
 25 section 5547 the following:

“5547a. Special limitations on premium pay for employees engaged in wildland firefighting.”.

1 **SEC. 5. REST AND RECUPERATION LEAVE FOR EMPLOYEES**

2 **ENGAGED IN WILDLAND FIREFIGHTING.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 63 of
4 title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting after
5 section 6329d the following:

6 **“§ 6329e. Rest and recuperation leave for employees**
7 **engaged in wildland firefighting**

8 “(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

9 “(1) the term ‘applicable Secretary’ means the
10 Secretary of Agriculture or the Secretary of the In-
11 terior, as applicable to a covered employee;

12 “(2) the term ‘covered employee’ means an em-
13 ployee of the Forest Service or the Department of
14 the Interior who—

15 “(A) qualifies as a wildland firefighter
16 based on the definitions of the terms ‘fire-
17 fighter’ and ‘wildland firefighter’ in section
18 5332a(a) (applying the definition of ‘employee’
19 in section 6301(2) in lieu of the definition of
20 ‘employee’ in section 5331(a)); or

21 “(B) is certified by the applicable Sec-
22 retary to perform wildland fire incident related
23 duties during the period the employee is as-
24 signed to a qualifying incident; and

1 “(3) the term ‘qualifying incident’ has the
2 meaning given the term in section 5545c(a)(5).

3 “(b) REST AND RECUPERATION LEAVE.—A covered
4 employee may receive paid rest and recuperation leave fol-
5 lowing the completion of service under a qualifying inci-
6 dent, subject to policies established at the sole and exclu-
7 sive discretion of the applicable Secretary, after consulting
8 with the other Secretary.

9 “(c) USE OF LEAVE.—

10 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Rest and recuperation
11 leave granted under this section—

12 “(A) shall be used during scheduled hours
13 within the tour of duty of the applicable covered
14 employee established for leave-charging pur-
15 poses and shall be paid in the same manner as
16 annual leave;

17 “(B) shall be used immediately after a
18 qualifying incident; and

19 “(C) may not be set aside for later use.

20 “(2) NO PAYMENT FOR UNUSED LEAVE.—A
21 covered employee may not receive any payment for
22 unused rest and recuperation leave granted under
23 this section.

24 “(d) INTERMITTENT WORK SCHEDULE.—A covered
25 employee with an intermittent work schedule shall—

1 “(1) be excused from duty during the same pe-
 2 riod of time that other covered employees in the
 3 same circumstances are entitled to rest and recuper-
 4 ation leave; and

5 “(2) receive a payment as if the covered em-
 6 ployee were entitled to rest and recuperation leave
 7 under subsections (b) and (c).”.

8 (b) **EFFECTIVE DATE.**—The amendments made by
 9 subsection (a) shall take effect on the first day of the first
 10 applicable pay period beginning on or after October 1,
 11 2025.

12 (c) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT.**—The table of sections
 13 for subchapter II of chapter 63 of title 5, United States
 14 Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to
 15 section 6329d the following:

“6329e. Rest and recuperation leave for employees engaged in wildland fire-
 fighting.”.

16 **SEC. 6. HEALTH PROVISIONS.**

17 (a) **DATABASE; RECOMMENDATIONS.**—Not later than
 18 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secre-
 19 taries shall—

20 (1) establish and maintain on a website a pub-
 21 licly accessible, searchable database, to be known as
 22 the “Federal Wildland Firefighter Cancer and Car-
 23 diovascular Disease Database”, to track chronic dis-
 24 ease caused by on-the-job environmental exposure

1 over the lifetimes of current and former Federal
 2 wildland firefighters;

3 (2) update the database under paragraph (1)
 4 not less frequently than annually; and

5 (3) develop and adhere to recommendations re-
 6 garding mitigation strategies to minimize exposure
 7 to environmental hazards for Federal wildland fire-
 8 fighters.

9 (b) MENTAL HEALTH.—

10 (1) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—

11 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than January
 12 1, 2026, the Secretaries shall establish and
 13 carry out a mental health awareness and sup-
 14 port program for Federal wildland firefighters.

15 (B) INCLUSIONS.—The program under this
 16 paragraph shall include the following:

17 (i) A mental health awareness cam-
 18 paign.

19 (ii) A mental health education and
 20 training program that includes an
 21 onboarding curriculum.

22 (iii) An extensive peer-to-peer mental
 23 health support network for Federal
 24 wildland firefighters and their immediate
 25 families.

1 (iv) Expansion of the Critical Incident
2 Stress Management Program—

3 (I) to develop and retain a larger
4 pool of qualified mental health profes-
5 sionals who are familiar with the ex-
6 periences of the emergency response
7 workforce; and

8 (II) to monitor and track mental
9 health in the Federal wildland fire-
10 fighter profession to better—

11 (aa) understand the scope of
12 the issue of mental health; and

13 (bb) provide ongoing assist-
14 ance and professional long-term
15 care to patients.

16 (v) Establish and carry out a new and
17 distinct mental health support service spe-
18 cific to Federal wildland firefighters and
19 their immediate families—

20 (I) with culturally relevant and
21 trauma-informed mental health pro-
22 fessionals who are readily available;
23 and

1 (II) not subject to any limit on
 2 the number of sessions or services
 3 provided.

4 (2) MENTAL HEALTH LEAVE.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-
 6 graph (B), each Federal wildland firefighter
 7 shall be entitled to 7 consecutive days of mental
 8 health leave, without loss or reduction in pay,
 9 during a calendar year.

10 (B) REQUIREMENTS.—Mental health leave
 11 provided under subparagraph (A) shall not—

12 (i) accumulate for use in any suc-
 13 ceeding calendar year; or

14 (ii) be considered to be annual or va-
 15 cation leave—

16 (I) for purposes of section 5551
 17 or 5552 of title 5, United States
 18 Code; or

19 (II) for any other purpose.

20 (c) COORDINATION.—In carrying out subsections (a)
 21 and (b), the Secretaries may enter into partnerships or
 22 cooperative agreements with other Federal agencies, insti-
 23 tutions of higher education, or nonprofit organizations.

24 (d) OWCP.—The Office of Workers' Compensation
 25 Programs within the Department of Labor shall—

1 (1) recognize post-traumatic stress disorder and
2 psychological stress-related injuries and illnesses cor-
3 related to fire protection, suppression, and incident
4 support activities;

5 (2) ensure long-term coverage for the duration
6 of the injuries and illnesses described in paragraph
7 (1); and

8 (3) expand the Special Claims Unit to ensure
9 unit staffing levels are sufficient to expedite the
10 claims process and shorten response times to Fed-
11 eral wildland firefighters and incident support per-
12 sonnel injured or affected on the job in order to al-
13 leviate the psychological and financial burdens
14 placed on patients and their families.

15 **SEC. 7. RETIREMENT FOR FIREFIGHTERS.**

16 (a) DEPOSIT SERVICE.—Notwithstanding any other
17 provision of law, any service performed by an individual
18 as a Federal wildland firefighter on or after January 1,
19 1989, for which retirement deductions under chapter 84
20 of title 5, United States Code, have not been made shall
21 be creditable under that chapter, if—

22 (1) that firefighter submits a written election to
23 the Director; and

1 (2) the deposit requirements of section 8411(f)
 2 of that title have been met with respect to that serv-
 3 ice.

4 (b) DISABILITY ANNUITY.—Beginning on the date of
 5 enactment of this Act, any Federal wildland firefighter
 6 who suffers from a disease described in section
 7 8143b(b)(2) of title 5, United States Code, due to environ-
 8 mental job-related exposure, including smoke inhalation,
 9 silicate inhalation, and firefighting toxic exposure, shall be
 10 considered to be disabled for purposes of section 8451 of
 11 that title, except that such section 8451 shall be applied
 12 to any such firefighter by substituting “12 months” for
 13 “18 months”.

14 (c) INCLUDING OVERTIME AS BASIC PAY.—Section
 15 8331(3) of title 5, United States Code, is amended—

16 (1) in subparagraph (H), by striking “and” at
 17 the end;

18 (2) in subparagraph (I), by inserting “and”
 19 after the semicolon;

20 (3) by inserting after subparagraph (I) the fol-
 21 lowing:

22 “(J) with respect to a Federal wildland
 23 firefighter (as that term is defined in section
 24 1(b) of the Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter
 25 Classification and Pay Parity Act), overtime

1 pay received on or after the date of enactment
2 of this subparagraph;” and

3 (4) in the undesignated matter following sub-
4 paragraph (J) (as added by paragraph (3)), by strik-
5 ing “subparagraphs (B) through (I) of this para-
6 graph” and inserting “subparagraphs (B) through
7 (J) of this paragraph,”.

8 (d) SEPARATE NORMAL-COST PERCENTAGE.—Sec-
9 tion 8423(a)(1)(B)(i) of title 5, United States Code, is
10 amended by inserting after “firefighters,” the following:
11 “Federal wildland firefighters (as that term is defined in
12 section 1(b) of the Tim Hart Wildland Firefighter Classi-
13 fication and Pay Parity Act),”.

14 **SEC. 8. PAY PARITY FOR FEDERAL STRUCTURAL FIRE-**
15 **FIGHTERS.**

16 (a) DEFINITION.—In this section, the term “Federal
17 structural firefighter”—

18 (1) has the meaning given the term “fire-
19 fighter” in section 8401 of title 5, United States
20 Code; and

21 (2) does not include a Federal wildland fire-
22 fighter.

23 (b) REQUIREMENTS.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Beginning on the date that
25 is 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, any

1 pay, benefits, and bonuses provided to any Federal
2 structural firefighter shall be comparable with the
3 pay, benefits, and bonuses provided to Federal
4 wildland firefighters under this Act and the amend-
5 ments made by this Act.

6 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the
7 date on which special base rates of pay are estab-
8 lished under section 5332a of title 5, United States
9 Code, as added by section 2 of this Act, the Director
10 shall submit to Congress a report on whether pay
11 for such Federal structural firefighters is competi-
12 tive with that for Federal wildland firefighters.

13 **SEC. 9. PAY ADJUSTMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS.**

14 (a) ANNUAL ADJUSTMENTS.—Notwithstanding any
15 other provision of law, beginning in the first pay period
16 beginning on or after the date on which special base rates
17 of pay are established under section 5332a of title 5,
18 United States Code, as added by section 2 of this Act,
19 and annually thereafter, the basic rate of pay for each
20 Federal wildland firefighter to which those special base
21 rates of pay apply shall be increased by not less than the
22 percentage equal to the percent change in the Consumer
23 Price Index (all items—United States city average), pub-
24 lished monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for De-
25 cember of the preceding year over such Consumer Price

1 Index for the December of the year prior to the preceding
 2 year, adjusted to the nearest $\frac{1}{10}$ of 1 percent.

3 (b) COMPENSATION COMPARABLE TO NON-FEDERAL
 4 FIREFIGHTERS.—Not later than 1 year after the date on
 5 which special base rates of pay are established under sec-
 6 tion 5332a of title 5, United States Code, as added by
 7 section 2 of this Act, the Secretaries shall submit to Con-
 8 gress a report on whether pay, benefits, and bonuses pro-
 9 vided to Federal wildland firefighters are comparable to
 10 the pay, benefits, and bonuses provided for non-Federal
 11 firefighters in the State or locality where Federal wildland
 12 firefighters are based.

13 (c) HAZARDOUS DUTY PAY.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Each Federal wildland fire-
 15 fighter carrying out work completed during pre-
 16 scribed fire, parachuting, tree climbing over 20 feet,
 17 hazard tree removal, and other hazardous work, as
 18 identified by the Secretaries, shall be entitled to be
 19 paid the appropriate differential under section
 20 5545(d) of title 5, United States Code, as if that
 21 Federal wildland firefighter was covered by such sec-
 22 tion 5545(d).

23 (2) REGULATIONS.—The Director may pre-
 24 scribe regulations to carry out this subsection.

25 (d) OTHER MATTERS.—

1 (1) RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION BONUS.—

2 (A) IN GENERAL.—In order to promote the
3 recruitment and retention of Federal wildland
4 firefighters, the Director, in coordination with
5 the Secretaries, shall establish a program under
6 which a recruitment or retention bonus of not
7 less than \$1,000 may be paid to a Federal
8 wildland firefighter in an amount determined
9 appropriate by the Director and the Secretaries.

10 (B) MINIMUM AMOUNT.—The minimum
11 amount of a bonus described in subparagraph
12 (A) shall be increased each year by the Con-
13 sumer Price Index in the manner prescribed
14 under subsection (a).

15 (C) TIMING OF PAYMENTS.—Any bonus
16 under this subsection—

17 (i) shall be paid to any primary or
18 secondary Federal wildland firefighter
19 upon the date that such firefighter success-
20 fully completes a work capacity test; and

21 (ii) may not be paid to an individual
22 described in clause (i) more than once per
23 calendar year.

24 (2) HOUSING ALLOWANCE.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretaries shall
2 provide a housing allowance to any Federal
3 wildland firefighter deployed to a location more
4 than 50 miles from the primary residence of
5 that Federal wildland firefighter.

6 (B) AMOUNT.—An allowance paid under
7 subparagraph (A) shall be in an amount deter-
8 mined appropriate by the Secretaries and ad-
9 justed based on the cost of housing in the area
10 of deployment.

11 (3) CAREER TRANSITION.—

12 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year
13 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Sec-
14 retaries shall establish, and thereafter shall
15 maintain, coordinate, and operate, a voluntary
16 tuition assistance program for Federal wildland
17 firefighters occupying permanent positions,
18 which shall encompass a broad range of edu-
19 cational experiences (either in-person or
20 through distance-learning), including academic
21 skills development, vocational programs, career
22 and technical programs, and programs leading
23 to the award of undergraduate and graduate
24 degrees.

1 (B) AMOUNT.—The program under sub-
 2 paragraph (A) shall provide, not more than
 3 once during each calendar year, a payment of
 4 not less than \$4,000 to each Federal wildland
 5 firefighter who elects to participate in the pro-
 6 gram.

7 (C) REVIEW.—The Secretaries shall con-
 8 duct an annual review of whether the amount
 9 provided under subparagraph (B) is adequate,
 10 in consideration of inflation and other effects.

11 **SEC. 10. WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT CASUALTY ASSIST-**
 12 **ANCE PROGRAM.**

13 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

14 (1) AFFECTED FIREFIGHTER.—The term “af-
 15 fected firefighter” means any Federal wildland fire-
 16 fighter or Federal wildland fire support personnel
 17 who—

18 (A) requires hospitalization or treatment at
 19 a medical facility due to a line-of-duty injury or
 20 illness; or

21 (B) is killed in the line of duty.

22 (2) AFFECTED NEXT-OF-KIN.—The term “af-
 23 fected next-of-kin”, with respect to an affected fire-
 24 fighter, means an individual related to the affected

1 firefighter, as determined in accordance with the fol-
2 lowing descending order of priority:

3 (A) A surviving legal spouse.

4 (B) A child (whether by current or prior
5 relationship) aged 18 years or older, in descend-
6 ing precedence by age.

7 (C) A parent, unless custody has been
8 vested in another individual by court order, in
9 which case an adoptive parent shall take prece-
10 dence over the natural parent from whom cus-
11 tody has been so removed.

12 (D) A sibling (whether whole or half) aged
13 18 years or older, in descending precedence by
14 age.

15 (E) A grandparent.

16 (F) Any other relative, with precedence to
17 be determined in accordance with the applicable
18 civil law of descent of the State of domicile of
19 the affected firefighter at the time of the appli-
20 cable illness or injury or death.

21 (3) CASUALTY ASSISTANCE OFFICER.—The
22 term “casualty assistance officer” means an indi-
23 vidual employed by the Department of the Interior
24 to assist affected firefighters and affected next-of-
25 kin with respect to the injury, illness, or death of an

1 affected firefighter, including by providing advice re-
2 lating to—

3 (A) services and benefits available under
4 the Program to affected firefighters and af-
5 fected next-of-kin; and

6 (B) funeral arrangements, if applicable.

7 (4) PROGRAM.—The term “Program” means
8 the Wildland Fire Management Casualty Assistance
9 Program established under subsection (b).

10 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
11 the Secretary of the Interior.

12 (b) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days after
13 the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
14 tablish a program, to be known as the “Wildland Fire
15 Management Casualty Assistance Program”, under which
16 the Secretary shall provide assistance in accordance with
17 this section to affected firefighters and affected next-of-
18 kin.

19 (c) INCLUSIONS.—The Program shall include the fol-
20 lowing:

21 (1) The provision to affected next-of-kin of the
22 initial, and any subsequent, notification regarding
23 the injury, illness, or death of an affected firefighter.

1 (2) The reimbursement of affected next-of-kin
2 for expenses associated with travel to visit an af-
3 fected firefighter.

4 (3) The qualifications, assignment, training, du-
5 ties, supervision, and accountability for the perform-
6 ance of casualty assistance officers.

7 (4) The relief or transfer of casualty assistance
8 officers, including, in any case in which a casualty
9 assistance officer is reassigned to another duty, the
10 provision of notice of that reassignment to the appli-
11 cable affected firefighters and affected next-of-kin.

12 (5) Centralized short-term and long-term case
13 management procedures for casualty assistance offi-
14 cers, including ensuring rapid access to expert case
15 managers and counselors by—

16 (A) casualty assistance officers; and

17 (B) affected firefighters and affected next-
18 of-kin.

19 (6) The provision, through a computer-acces-
20 sible website and other means and at no cost to af-
21 fected firefighters and affected next-of-kin, of per-
22 sonalized, integrated information relating to the ben-
23 efits and financial assistance available from the Fed-
24 eral Government to affected firefighters and affected
25 next-of-kin.

1 (7) The provision to affected firefighters and
 2 affected next-of-kin of information relating to mech-
 3 anisms for registering complaints regarding, or re-
 4 quests for, additional casualty assistance.

5 (8) Coordination among the Department of the
 6 Interior, the Department of Justice, and the Social
 7 Security Administration to ensure prompt and accu-
 8 rate resolution of issues relating to benefits adminis-
 9 tered by those agencies for affected firefighters and
 10 affected next-of-kin.

11 (9) Data collection, in consultation with the
 12 United States Fire Administration and the National
 13 Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, re-
 14 garding the incidence and quality of casualty assist-
 15 ance provided to affected firefighters and affected
 16 next-of-kin.

17 (d) NO EFFECT ON CERTAIN BENEFITS.—The Pro-
 18 gram shall not affect any existing authority relating to
 19 line-of-duty death benefits for affected firefighters.

20 **SEC. 11. CONTINUING ACCRUAL OF SERVICE FOR FIRE-**
 21 **FIGHTERS.**

22 (a) FEDERAL EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM.—
 23 Section 8401(14) of title 5, United States Code, is amend-
 24 ed to read as follows:

25 “(14) the term ‘firefighter’ means—

1 “(A) an employee, the duties of whose po-
2 sition—

3 “(i) are primarily to perform work di-
4 rectly connected with the control and extin-
5 guishment of non-wildland fires; and

6 “(ii) are sufficiently rigorous that em-
7 ployment opportunities should be limited to
8 young and physically vigorous individuals,
9 as determined by the Director considering
10 the recommendations of the employing
11 agency;

12 “(B) an employee, the duties of whose po-
13 sition—

14 “(i) are primarily to perform work di-
15 rectly connected with the control and extin-
16 guishment of wildland fires; and

17 “(ii) are sufficiently rigorous that em-
18 ployment opportunities should be limited to
19 young and physically vigorous individuals,
20 as determined by the Director considering
21 the recommendations of the employing
22 agency;

23 “(C) an employee who—

24 “(i) is transferred directly to a super-
25 visory or administrative position after per-

1 forming duties described in subparagraph
 2 (A) for at least 3 years; and

3 “(ii) while serving in the supervisory
 4 or administrative position described in
 5 clause (i), has no break in service; or

6 “(D) an employee who—

7 “(i) occupies a supervisory or admin-
 8 istrative position after performing duties
 9 described in subparagraph (B) for at least
 10 3 years; and

11 “(ii) has not more than 24 months in
 12 total time of breaks in service;”.

13 (b) SERVICE BEFORE DATE OF ENACTMENT.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to the requirements
 15 under paragraph (2), service performed before the
 16 date of enactment of this Act by an individual who,
 17 on the date of enactment of this Act, is an employee
 18 (as defined in section 8401(11) of title 5, United
 19 States Code) shall, for the purposes of chapter 84 of
 20 title 5, United States Code, be treated as service
 21 performed by a firefighter if—

22 (A) that service was performed during the
 23 period beginning on October 1, 2003, and end-
 24 ing on the day before the date of enactment of
 25 this Act;

1 (B) at the time of performing such serv-
 2 ice—

3 (i) the individual did not meet the re-
 4 quirements to be a firefighter under sec-
 5 tion 8401(14) of title 5, United States
 6 Code, because of a break in service; and

7 (ii) would have met the requirements
 8 to be a firefighter under section
 9 8401(14)(D) of title 5, United States
 10 Code, as amended by this Act; and

11 (C) appropriate deductions and
 12 withholdings under sections 8422 and 8423 of
 13 title 5, United States Code, were made during
 14 such service.

15 (2) CREDIT FOR SERVICE.—To receive credit
 16 for eligible service under paragraph (1), the applica-
 17 ble individual shall—

18 (A) before the date on which the individual
 19 separates from service in the agency in which
 20 the individual holds a position on the date of
 21 enactment of this Act, submit a written election
 22 to the agency employing the individual;

23 (B) if the individual is not employed by the
 24 agency that employed the individual when the
 25 service described in paragraph (1) was per-

1 formed, submit a written election to such agen-
2 cy; and

3 (C) remit to the agency that employed the
4 individual when such service was performed the
5 additional amount that would have been de-
6 ducted during the period of prior service under
7 section 8422 of title 5, United States Code,
8 from the pay of the individual if the amend-
9 ments made by subsection (a) had been in ef-
10 fect during the prior service, plus any applicable
11 interest computed under section 8334(e) of title
12 5, United States Code.

13 (3) GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTIONS.—If an indi-
14 vidual remits payment under paragraph (2)(C) with
15 respect to service described in paragraph (1), the
16 agency that employed the individual when such serv-
17 ice was performed shall remit to the Office of Per-
18 sonnel Management (for deposit in the Treasury of
19 the United States to the credit of the Civil Service
20 Retirement and Disability Fund) the total additional
21 amount of Federal contributions that would have
22 been paid under section 8423 of title 5, United
23 States Code, if the amendments made by subsection
24 (a) had been in effect during the prior service, plus

1 any applicable interest computed in accordance with
2 section 8334(e) of title 5, United States Code.

3 (4) NOTIFICATION AND ASSISTANCE REQUIRE-
4 MENTS.—The Director shall—

5 (A) take such action as may be necessary
6 and appropriate to inform individuals entitled
7 to have any service credited under this sub-
8 section, or to have any annuity computed under
9 this subsection, of the entitlement to the credit
10 or computation; and

11 (B) upon request, assist any individual de-
12 scribed in subparagraph (A) in obtaining such
13 information in the possession of the Secretary
14 of Agriculture or the Secretary of the Interior,
15 as applicable, as may be necessary to verify the
16 entitlement of the individual to have any service
17 credited, or to have any annuity computed, pur-
18 suant to this subsection.

19 (5) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing in this
20 section may be construed to permit or require the
21 making of any contribution to the Thrift Savings
22 Fund that would not otherwise have been permitted
23 or required but for the enactment of this section.

○